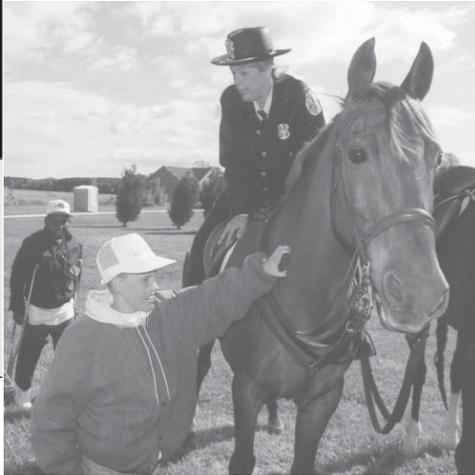


## PROTECTING LIVES, RESOURCES, AND PROPERTY



### WILDLAND FIRE

Guided by the National Fire Plan, developed jointly by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture in response to the devastating 2000 fire season, Interior's four wildland fire management agencies BLM, BIA, NPS, and FWS and the U.S. Forest Service have undertaken significant steps toward a seamless wildland fire management program. The cooperation and collaboration of five Federal agencies engaged in Federal firefighting, the Western Governors Association, State foresters, local communities, Tribes, and many others has contributed to this success.

Congress has supported this effort by providing funds to increase firefighting capabilities, reduce the amount of hazardous fuels, increase fire-related research, increase State and local fire prevention and firefighting programs, increase community assistance, restore fire damaged lands, and improve accountability for the resources used in fighting wildland fires.

**A Collaborative Approach to Success** – Federal wildland firefighters were highly effective in the 2002 fire season, controlling over 97 percent of all fires on initial attack, with less than one percent expanding to 300 acres or more. Yet, as the severity of the 2002 fire season demonstrates, even the best firefighting efforts are not enough without an effective risk reduction strategy. In May 2002, Interior and the Forest Service agreed to the Implementation Plan for a *Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the*

*Environment*. This plan, the product of the cooperation among the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, the Western Governors Association, and representatives from many other public and private organizations and agencies, sets forth the blueprint for achieving the goals of the comprehensive strategy to aggressively manage wildland fires and reduce hazardous fuels, protect firefighters and communities, and restore ecosystems over the next decade. Collaboration is the linchpin of the strategy. It calls upon local managers to work with States, Tribes, local governments, and citizens to plan the location of firefighting resources, fuels reduction treatments, and restoration projects in previously burned areas.

The 2004 request for the wildland fire program includes programmatic increases totaling \$45.0 million to fund suppression at the 10-year average, enhance Interior's capacity for timely rehabilitation of burned areas, and address rising aviation insurance costs and aviation safety issues.

**Preparedness** – In 2004, Interior will continue to collaborate with the Forest Service, States, Tribes, and local entities to strengthen and improve the preparedness and readiness of our collective firefighting resources. The Federal fire agencies will strive to improve program efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In particular, Interior and the Forest Service will continue to develop and begin using the new interagency fire planning system to optimize cost effectiveness for fire readiness resources. As part of the implementation of the *Strategic Human Capital Management Plan*, the Department is addressing the challenge of the impending retirement of many skilled fire managers.

The 2004 budget provides \$282.7 million for fire preparedness, an increase of \$5.5 million over the 2003 President's budget. The request includes an increase of \$5.0 million for aviation contract costs. This increase is necessary to maintain the current level of aircraft support in the face of rapidly rising aviation contract costs, primarily attributable to a rise in the aircraft contractors' costs of insurance since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The requested increases will also help Interior address necessary aviation safety improvements. The blue ribbon fact finding panel on aviation, which was convened to examine fire aviation safety in the wake of the 2002 season's fatal accidents, completed a report that recommends instituting higher safety standards and protocols, including more frequent and comprehensive inspections.



**Suppression Operations** – In 2002, the Nation witnessed the second worst wildland fire season in 40 years. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture jointly spent over \$1.6 billion in emergency suppression fighting fires that burned more than 7.1 million acres. More than 1,200 homes were lost to wildfire. Many of the hazardous conditions that contributed to the severity of the 2002 fire season, such as heavy fuels loads and increased urbanization near public lands, will continue to influence future fire activity. In recognition of this fact, the 2004 budget request proposes a \$35.0 million increase to fund suppression operations at the revised 10-year average. The fire program will also continue to work to



develop new, and improve current, suppression cost control strategies. Funding the program at the request level will provide resources to respond to an "average" fire year without having to rely on emergency borrowing that can be disruptive to other Interior programs.

**Hazardous Fuels Reduction** – One of the guiding principles of the Wildland Fire Management 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and its implementation plan is active forest management to reduce hazardous fuels in priority areas. Active fuels management will be focused both in the wildland-urban interface and in areas most at risk outside of the WUI. This targeted fuel treatment approach will make communities and the environment safer from destructive wildfires. Two-thirds of public lands are at moderate to high risk of catastrophic fire, including over 35 million acres infested by fire-prone invasive species and noxious weeds. Experts say western public land forests are 15 times denser than 100 years ago, leading to bigger, hotter, and more destructive wildfires. Rather than let the forests continue to deteriorate slowly, and risk larger, hotter burning fires, we need to change management practices. Two key tools are prescribed fires and mechanical thinning to remove underbrush, smaller trees, and diseased and dead trees that create extremely combustible conditions. The 10-year implementation plan sets forth actions to improve the productivity of the fuels treatment program. Nevertheless, a problem that took a century to create will not be solved overnight.

The Department is taking a number of steps to improve the productivity and performance of the WUI (and non-WUI) fuels program. These in-

clude implementation of an accelerated project planning and selection process, the issuance of policy guidance and proposed legislative language designed to facilitate and expand contracting in the fuels program, and the issuance of policy guidance to expedite the budget allocation process for the fuels program and individual projects. These three measures will help the firefighting bureaus take maximum advantage of the opportunity for fuels treatment projects at the beginning of the fiscal year when weather and workload conditions for fuels treatments are optimal. Interior will continue to emphasize and increase the percentage of WUI projects conducted by small and local contractors, and the percentage of projects completed using mechanical treatments. Enactment and implementation of the President's Healthy Forests initiative will also expedite Federal and local efforts to restore forest health and reduce fire risks through thinning projects and fuels reduction treatments by streamlining the procedural requirements for some of these projects. The Wildland Fire program will also work to improve the targeting of fuels reduction funding by both defining the wildland-urban interface and developing criteria for ranking and selecting projects.



The 2004 budget of \$186.2 million funds the hazardous fuels program and WUI programs at roughly the 2003 request level. Within the request level, the fire program will continue to address the threat posed by the dangerous buildup of fuels on Interior lands. The 2004 request will enable Interior bureaus to treat 307,000 high priority acres in the wildland-urban interface. The requested funding will also enable Interior bureaus to treat and improve the condition of 768,000 non-WUI acres.

**Burned Area Rehabilitation** - The emergency stabilization, rehabilitation, and restoration of burned areas play critical roles in protecting and restoring the health of watersheds and landscapes. Timely stabilization and rehabilitation of severely burned areas are critical to prevent further damage to the area due to erosion, loss of soil nutrients, and the

introduction and spread of invasive weeds and to restore the landscape to a fire-adapted state, using native and other desirable plant species.

The 2004 budget includes an increase of \$4.5 million for burned area rehabilitation. The rehabilitation of burned areas, which spans one to three years, is critical to convert fire-damaged lands into healthy fire-adapted ecosystems. The Department will use \$2.0 million of the increase to continue efforts to build a long-term stockpile of native seeds in support of the native plant materials development project. The funds will be used for both commercial seed acquisition and wildland seed collection. Native seeds are more expensive than the non-native alien seeds commonly used in the stabilization and rehabilitation program; however, they are superior in terms of effectiveness and are less expensive in the long-run because they are less prone to fire. The remaining \$2.5 million in reha-

bilitation will enable Interior to perform on-the-ground burned-area treatments, from seeding acres, to installing fencing and other erosion control barriers, to cleaning out culverts. Rehabilitation requirements correspond to the severity of preceding fire seasons

**Rural Fire Assistance** – Successful implementation of the National Fire Plan and the comprehensive strategy depends on well trained and equipped local firefighting departments, as these units are frequently the first responders to wildland fires on public lands and play a vital role in preventing wildland fires from escaping initial attack and becoming exponentially more expensive to suppress. Interior's Rural Fire Assistance program represents a modest Federal investment that can provide significant, long-term dividends in helping to control overall suppression costs. The program provides vital training, technical assistance, and equipment to rural and volunteer fire departments to enhance their capacity and effectiveness as the first line of defense for many wildfires. The 2004 budget continues to fund the Rural Fire Assistance program at the 2003 level of \$10.0 million.

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### **Ongoing Cooperative Efforts to Improve Wildland Fire Management**

In April 2002, the Secretaries of Departments of the Interior and Agriculture formed the Wildland Fire Leadership Council, a board of directors dedicated to achieving consistent implementation of the goals, actions, and policies of the National Fire Plan, the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan, and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The heads of the five wildland fire management agencies resolved several key issues such as common performance measures, common fire cost accounting protocols, and seamless direction for an effective hazardous fuels reduction program. Other ongoing cooperative efforts and strategic initiatives to improve wildland fire management include:

- Finalize formal memorandum of understanding between the States, Interior, and U.S. Forest Service that sets priorities for hazardous fuels reduction projects.
- Join with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and National Association of State Foresters in an agreement to improve and standardize grant administration and application review process for awards to rural and volunteer fire departments for equipment, training, and prevention.
- Complete an interagency cohesive fuels strategy for fuels reduction.
- Improve aircraft operations based on the report of a blue ribbon panel.
- Develop a new interagency fire preparedness planning process to determine optimal cost-effective programs.
- Implement the Healthy Forests initiative designed to reduce the amount of time necessary to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects.
- Standardize accounting practices for firefighter base pay costs.
- Develop a new fire incident cost-coding system to allow the aggregation of the costs of all the fire agencies related to specific wildfires in a consistent and comparable manner.
- Standardize definitions and accounting practices for emergency stabilization, rehabilitation, and restoration across the five agencies.
- Develop strategies to recruit and retain qualified firefighters, especially for key field leadership positions.

## 2002 NATIONAL FIRE PLAN PROGRESS

Among other successes in 2002 the five agencies:

- Issued a joint Forest Service and Department of the Interior memorandum defining the collaborative process for fuels project development and selection.
- Accelerated and required the selection of fuels reduction projects using a new prioritization process.
- Completed a charter for an interagency fuels coordination committee. The committee will assist and provide guidance in development and implementation of an effective, interagency fuels management program to address risks from severe fires in wildland urban interface communities and to restore healthy ecological systems in other wildland areas.
- Established a fire learning network with The Nature Conservancy that selected 40 landscapes to concentrate efforts and demonstrate ecosystem restoration.
- Hired, maintained, and trained a wildland firefighting workforce of 17,436 personnel including 15,152 frontline firefighters.
- Supported a fleet of 2,001 engines, 153 helicopters, and 205 bulldozers.
- Initiated 141 facilities maintenance and construction projects.
- Treated 2.28 million acres of hazardous fuels on Federal land - 191,025 more acres than 2001.
- Treated 1.02 million acres of wildland fuels on Federal lands through wildland fire use.
- Treated 458,456 acres of insect and disease suppression projects; treated 6,039 acres for the control of invasive plants through grants to States; and carried out an extensive forest health monitoring program through the forest health protection program.
- Treated 1.2 million burned acres through rehabilitation and restoration.
- Assisted 5,349 rural and volunteer fire departments through grants, technical assistance, training, supplies, equipment, and public education support.
- Funded 11,400 mitigation and education campaigns, nearly 400 community plans, 2,686 hazardous mitigation projects, and trained 13,000 firefighters through the State fire assistance program.
- Conducted 19 firewise workshops for more than 1,800 people, from 600 communities, in 47 States.
- Completed 1,070 projects including bio-energy feasibility studies, wood product utilization and market feasibility studies, and community economic development planning through the economic action program.

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## LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement and nationwide security are necessary components to accomplishing the Department of the Interior's goal of serving communities through the protection of lives, resources, and property. As the third-largest Federal law enforcement agency, Interior provides protection to its employees, the many visitors to our lands and facilities, and the Nation's natural and cultural resources, including national icons, such as the Statue of Liberty. Interior also has direct responsibility for the security of monuments, dams, and reservoirs, and a shared responsibility with industry for oil and gas production and transmission facilities on Federal lands, including 4,000 offshore production oil and gas facilities, 33,000 miles of pipeline, and 55,000 petroleum workers in the Gulf of Mexico.

In 2002, Interior brought on a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Law Enforcement and Security and enhanced the Office of Law Enforcement and Security. The OLES has coordinated and identified important areas where the Department's programs are vulnerable and is working with the bureaus to develop appropriate protective measures, including implementation of a series of Secretarial directives to improve accountability and effectiveness.

**Border Law Enforcement** – The Department's law enforcement agencies are also responsible for extensive security in border areas administered by Interior in cooperation with other Federal, State, and local entities. The 2004 budget proposal includes an increase of \$6.0 million for improved security and law enforcement at parks, refuges, and public lands.

The Department has law enforcement jurisdiction for nearly one-half of the 2,000-mile border with Mexico and nearly 720 miles of the U.S. – Canada border. In addition, Interior manages substantial public lands along the Gulf Coast and in southern Florida, and has trust responsibility for islands in both the Pacific and Caribbean that are vulnerable to illegal entry into the U. S.

Stepped up law enforcement and security in urban areas and traditional routes across the borders

are pressuring smugglers, drug traffickers, and other criminals to increasingly use parks, refuges, and public lands to cross the borders. The Department is concerned about public safety issues as well as the potential for harm to natural resources. Smuggling in these areas also impacts irreplaceable resources and causes tremendous impact on local communities with the heaviest impact on the Southwest border region.

**Critical Infrastructure Protection** – In working with the Department of Homeland Security, Interior maintains a confidential listing of facilities, referred to as the Department of the Interior *Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets List*. These are facilities and assets whose incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating impact on national security, national economic security, national public health or safety, and the Nation's morale or confidence. In concert with the managing bureaus, OLES is continuing to coordinate and enhance the security and protection of these assets and identify additional needs to further that security. The OLES is leading the bureaus in a coordinated effort to assess the vulnerabilities of all the facilities on the *Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets List*, including the Statue of Liberty and Hoover Dam, as well as other priority facilities nationwide. The bureaus have completed assessments of their critical assets and OLES is in the process of reviewing the assessments, confirming some, and requiring additional work on others. Reclamation has four dams on the list and has completed those security risk assessments, as well as assessments on over 50 of their highest priority dams, and has initiated corrective actions.



**Improving Security** – The BLM shares responsibility with private industry and local and State law enforcement entities for pipelines, communication, and

other facilities located on public lands. With a requested increase of \$700,000, BLM will enhance its law enforcement program and improve its capability to protect these important facilities.

The MMS is responsible for protecting over 4,000 offshore production facilities and approximately 33,000 miles of pipeline. The MMS works closely

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with OCS facility operators, the U.S. Coast Guard, other Federal agencies, and local authorities to identify potential security risks and appropriate security measures that should be implemented. An additional \$600,000 is requested for an enhanced effort to protect infrastructure.

The NPS continues to play a major role in the security operations of monuments and national icons. The NPS is requesting \$26.8 million in its construction program for enhanced security at the Washington Monument; Independence National

Historic Park, Pennsylvania; and Jefferson National Expansion Area, Missouri.

Finally, in order for OLES to continue to lead Interior's law enforcement and security activities, it must have a viable and adequate professional staff. The OLES is requesting \$400,000 to strengthen its capability to coordinate security and law enforcement with its addition of a border security and drug program coordinator, a critical assets coordinator, an internal affairs coordinator, and a nationwide security officer.